OREGONIAN
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—The People's Own Corner—

'Hysterical Symbolism'

To the Editor: I weary of the emotional outpourings that regularly appear in your columns with regard to the "national disgrace of smoking" and similar themes. I would that these authors and Sen. Neuberger address themselves to the real problems of today and let the smokers inhale in peace. And before the accusing fingers start wagging this way, let me hasten to add that I do not smoke. But I sure used to.

I am thankful for and heartily support the investigations into the causes of lung cancer and other human scourges and hasten to shout approval of the complete public dissemination of the findings. Let no one deny that many reputable and conscientious agencies have made thorough investigations of these public health matters. As a free and thinking individual I considered these findings and decided that the possible consequences of my continued heavy smoking was not in my best interest. But it was a personal decision for me, myself, to make — without coercion or verbal flogging. Any person so impressed can quit smoking if he or she so desires; the unwillingness to do so is the cause and source of the feeble excuses and so-called "lack of will-power."

To print a skull and crossbones on each package of cigarettes is garish nonsense. Why not paint one on the rear of each new automobile? The car is more killer than a pack of butts and, indeed, condemns many more thousands to destruction or a life of misery — many of them totally innocent. At least, the smoker hurts only himself — which is his own concern. There is absolutely no need for any government agency or group to force the restriction of tobacco sales, nor is there need for overt displays of hysterical symbolism.

How any person can equate liberty, slavery and other philosophies of social significance with addiction to tobacco, is beyond me. Any idiot that would trudge five miles in a snow storm for a smoke is not a "slave," but a damn fool — and certainly not representative. Equally as moronic is the person that is gullible enough to believe that the smoking of this or that brand produces the absolute ecstasy portrayed to the reader, or viewer. Under our system of free enterprise, the tobacco companies are hard-pressed to compete and if smoking-enjoyment claims sound fantastic, then so be it. We're not children. I've yet to read an ad cajoling the non-smokers to take up the habit, or expounding upon any health benefits to be derived from the same. They compete for the smoker's quarter; the non-smoker takes little or no heed of the incessant banter (albeit enjoying, I'm sure, many of the fine television programs sponsored by the vendors of the weed).

Children do need the protection of the law until such a time as they grow up and are able to make their own decisions. Most parents can see to it that their children are denied the general use of tobacco. If the older teen-ager then decides that smoking is for him, and he has been instructed as to the possible consequences of smoking, then well and good. After all, it's his health and his own business. I would only stress, again, the need for extensive reporting of available information on the effects of the use of tobacco—and other products as well—in the schools and all the news media. But don't enact more harassing legislation. Let 'em smoke—in peace.

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Smoking Adults Set Bad Example At School, Play

Hal Boyle recently reported that educators fret because more than 20 per cent of junior high school students now smoke. What are the causes? Over half of the educators smoke and they fret because a large number of students also smoke. The educators are the examples and students are the observers. Smoking should not be permitted on school areas and I am quite sure the percentage would drop. Adolescents are indelibly impressed, subconsciously if not consciously by habits of adults.

In our society the cigarette has become a symbol of sophistication, virile maturity, and potency. Why is everyone surprised to find youth as young as twelve becoming addicts to the terrible vice. Research shows that children whose parents do not smoke are less likely to become habitual smokers than children of parents who do. Overall prohibiting of smoking is impracticable. What parents should consider is a moral obligation to abstain, people working with children should not be allowed to smoke on the job or at any time in the presence of children. A legal clause to the effect should be included in each school teacher's contract.

A great many adults volunteer their services to work with children in recreational programs such as Little League, to reduce the complex problem of juvenile delinquency. These people mean well, but a problem is at hand regardless of their aptitude because these people are respected, imitated, even hero-worshipped by their youthful charges. Unfortunately the majority of men who engage in this activity are confirmed chain smokers. Whatever good they do accomplish is quickly nullified, even if just one child is impressed by the artificial vice of smoking. Only men who do not smoke should be permitted to participate in youth programs.

It is very important how our youth of tomorrow are trained and educated. It is also important by the codes of moral principle how they are trained, for they hold the future security of our country in their hand.

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